

CHAPTER XI

THE IX CORPS AND THE SUVLA PLAN

(Map 3 ; Sketch A)

July. So determined was Sir Ian Hamilton to keep his Suvla plan profoundly secret, that even General Stopford, who was to be charged with carrying it out, was allowed to know nothing about it till the 22nd July. On that day, however, Sir Ian crossed over to Helles, where Stopford was acting for a few days as commander of the VIII Corps,¹ and personally unfolded his plan. He gave him at the same time a secret memorandum, drawn up that morning, on the special rôle to be allotted to the IX Corps.

Map 3. A great deal of importance attaches to this memorandum Sketch of the 22nd July.² After giving a general outline of the plan A. for the August offensive, it pointed out that success would largely depend on the capture and retention of Suvla Bay as an advanced base. It then stated in unequivocal terms that General Stopford's first task would be to capture the two horns of the bay and the Chocolate and W Hills, and to secure a footing along the Tekke Tepe ridge. In particular it stated: "It is of first importance that the Chocolate and W Hills "should be captured by a *coup de main* before daylight" Finally, it suggested that General Stopford would probably be able to attain all these objectives with the 11th Division, and that the two brigades of the 10th, arriving at daybreak next morning, would then be available to advance straight on Biyuk Anafarta and come in on the flank of any enemy troops still holding out in the neighbourhood of Hill 971.

According to the figures in this memorandum, the only guns that could be landed for the 11th Division during the first night were two mountain batteries and one field battery. But no artillery could be of any assistance till daylight, and twelve

¹ As General Hunter-Weston had been invalided, General Stopford was sent to Helles, to gain some local experience while his own corps was assembling.

² Appendix 2.

more 18-pdrs. would be put ashore at daybreak, and another July. 18-pdr. brigade, a howitzer brigade and a heavy battery were to march along the coast from Anzac to join the IX Corps later in the morning.

It is clear from these instructions that little opposition was expected in the neighbourhood of Suvla Bay. The Turkish strength in the whole region was estimated at five battalions,¹ namely, one on the Chocolate Hills, one on the W Hills, and three in reserve at Anafarta Sagir. Lala Baba, Ghazi Baba and the Kiretch Tepe ridge were stated to be occupied by outposts; and there were said to be two heavy and three field guns on the Chocolate and W Hills. Attention was called to the belief that these guns could only fire to the southward, and that the hills were only entrenched against attack from the south and west. It was verbally explained to General Stopford that his best line for attacking the Chocolate Hills was round the northern side of the lake, and the doubts as to whether the lake was yet passable by infantry were also conveyed to him. He was informed that his main difficulties would be darkness, unknown country, and inexperience on the part of his troops, and that the Commander-in-Chief was counting on bold and vigorous leadership to overcome them.

Later in the day, after going through the scheme point by point with Lieut.-Colonel Aspinall, the officer in charge of the operations section at G.H.Q., who had accompanied Sir Ian Hamilton from Imbros, General Stopford expressed himself as completely satisfied with the task to be given to his corps. "Tell Sir Ian", he said, "that I have been studying the situation from available information ever since I left England" "and this is the plan which I have always hoped he would adopt. It is a good plan. I am sure it will succeed, and I congratulate whoever has been responsible for framing it."

But after a further consideration of the plan and a full discussion of its details with Br.-General H. L. Reed, V.C., the senior staff officer of the IX Corps, whom he summoned next day from Mudros to Helles for consultation, General Stopford's early confidence began to evaporate. On the 25th July, having handed over the temporary command of the VIII Corps to Major-General W. Douglas, commanding the 42nd Division, he opened his own IX Corps headquarters at Imbros, and on the 26th a request was made to G.H.Q. for a substantial revision of certain parts of the scheme. It was urged that "the whole teaching of the campaign in France

¹ Actually there were only three battalions in the area when the 11th Division landed.

July. " proves that troops cannot be expected to attack an organized " system of trenches without the assistance of a large number of " howitzers ", and that, as no howitzers would be available till the morning after the landing, the capture of the Chocolate and W Hills could not be completed by dawn. It was also suggested that for physical reasons alone none of the troops would be able to get as far as the Tekke Tepe ridge before daybreak. Finally, as it would apparently be best to attack the Chocolate Hills from the north, it was expressly urged that the infantry landing should be allowed to take place inside Suvla Bay:

General Headquarters were so convinced of the soundness of their scheme that they seem to have failed to appreciate the psychological dangers that now threatened its development. The latest aerial photographs showed no sign of "an organized " system of trenches " in the Suvla zone. In the vicinity of the beach there seemed to be no defences at all. There was a girdle of trenches on Lala Baba ; at Ghazi Baba, Kiretch Tepe, and perhaps on Hill 10,¹ there appeared to be nothing more serious than a few isolated trenches ; and the defences on the Chocolate and W Hills, though certainly more elaborate, could apparently be taken in reverse. In these circumstances it was all too confidently believed at G.H.Q. that once the troops were safely ashore the corps commander and his staff would discover for themselves that their early fears were groundless. The only real danger seemed to be that the Turks might learn of the plan before the troops landed. If secrecy could be maintained to the last, success seemed almost certain.

Nevertheless the objections raised by the corps did lead to certain modifications of the very definite instructions of the 22nd July. The most important had reference to the beach to be used by the 11th Division. The capture not only of the Chocolate and W Hills but of the enemy posts at Hill 10, Ghazi Baba and Kiretch Tepe, would be so plainly facilitated by a landing inside the bay that it was decided to ask the admiral again if this could not be attempted. The admiral and his staff were still averse to the proposal; they still feared that dangerous delays might result from uncharted rocks and sandbanks. But finally, though not without misgiving, they agreed to one infantry brigade being allowed to attempt a landing on a strip of beach, some 600 yards long, just north of the Cut.

¹ In point of fact the Turkish defences on Kiretch Tepe and Hill 10 were much stronger than G.H.Q. realized. On the other hand the Turks had no machine guns and no wire. Hill 10 (metre.) was a small mound, almost imperceptible from the sea.

In the final instructions to the IX Corps therefore,¹ issued July on the 29th July, it was laid down that one brigade of the 11th Division should land inside the bay. The other two brigades were to land, as originally arranged, to the south of Nibrunesi Point.² In a subsequent chapter it will be seen that this change of plan was disastrous. As the admiral had feared, the lighters lost their way. They grounded on submerged reefs, with deep water between them and the shore, and the resultant delays and disorganization were destined to act as an incalculably serious drag upon the whole programme of the attack.

The other modifications of the memorandum of the 22nd were equally unfortunate. It was decided that the main objectives for the IX Corps should not be varied, but that General Stopford must not be tied down in advance by any hard-and-fast order that such-and-such a point had got to be reached by dawn. In the final instructions, therefore, he was merely told that his primary object would be to secure Suvla Bay as a base for the northern zone. He was given a free hand in drawing up his plan to achieve this purpose, subject only to the Commander-in-Chief's final approval; and though his special attention was directed to the Chocolate and W Hills, the original clear-cut order to capture these positions before dawn was whittled down to read: "If it is possible, without "prejudice to the attainment of your primary objective, to "gain possession of these hills at an early period of your "attack, it will greatly facilitate the capture and retention of "Hill 971." Here may be seen, as in a mirror, the breath of indecision beginning to blur the outlines of Sir Ian Hamilton's scheme. The necessity of gaining and piqueting the Tekke Tepe ridge was no longer mentioned.

The leadership of troops in the field calls for the same determination as the riding of a horse over stiff country. Nothing is so quickly contagious as the resolution of the rider, and nothing so conducive to a fall as a hint of indecision.

¹ Appendix 3.

² Originally, when all three brigades were to land south of Nibrunesi Point, the three brigade landing-places, all contiguous, were named individually A B and C Beaches, reading from south to north, and were collectively referred to as "New Beach". The southernmost of these, A Beach, was now abandoned, but (presumably to avoid spoiling the map plate) the names B and C were retained for the other two, and A was used to denote the freshly chosen beach inside the bay. From south to north, therefore, the beaches were now lettered B, C, A. This mixing of the alphabetical order undoubtedly led to some unnecessary confusion and consequent delay, as also did the fact that the term "New Beach" was sometimes officially used for B and C Beaches, but not for A Beach, which was equally "new".

July. This psychological fact is so well known that it almost amounts to a platitude; yet it is difficult to make a close study of the Suvla operations without being led to the conclusion that this dilution of G.H.Q. instructions was amongst the root causes of failure. The indefinite instructions of the 29th July, and in particular the vague allusion to the capture of the Chocolate and W Hills, led to an equally indefinite order by the IX Corps; and the lack of precision in the corps order was reflected and magnified in the orders of the 11th Division.

On the afternoon of the 25th July General Stopford visited Anzac and had his first view of the Suvla zone, and the Australian historian¹ throws an interesting light on his attitude at that time:

The rate of advance of the Suvla troops was a matter closely affecting the Anzac plans. When, therefore, Stopford visited Anzac, Birdwood pressed upon him to make sure that every man knew his exact orders, so that upon landing all units would be able to start racing for their objectives at the top of the hills. Finding that Stopford was inclined to consider a preliminary bombardment necessary, Birdwood strongly advised him to trust to surprise. . . . Stopford was manifestly nervous as to the employment of his troops in a night advance to which they were unaccustomed. . . . His orders, shortly afterwards issued, contained no insistence whatever upon speed, nor any incitement to reach the objectives before dawn.

After receiving his amended instructions General Stopford, this time accompanied by Major-General F. Hammersley commanding the 11th Division, was given another distant view of Suvla from the deck of a destroyer. Returning to Imbros, he wrote to Sir Ian Hamilton explaining the methods by which he proposed to carry out his allotted task. This letter, with a draft copy of his operation order enclosed, was sent to the Commander-in-Chief on the 31st July.

In his letter, General Stopford expressed the conviction that the capture of the Tekke Tepe ridge was essential to the security of Suvla Bay. He would have liked, he said, to make for that ridge at once; but he realized that in order to prevent the enemy bringing fire to bear on Hill 971, his first task, after capturing the horns of the bay, must be to gain possession of the Chocolate and W Hills. "The capture of these 'hills', he continued, "by a *coup de main* at night would have such far-reaching effects that I have decided to attempt 'it'. But it would be 'a ticklish operation'. He gathered from the G.H.Q. reports that an attack on these hills from the south-west would be very costly in lives, and that less oppo-

¹ Australian Official Account, ii. p. 468.

sition might be expected if they were approached from the north. This being the case, and as General Hammersley considered that two brigades would be required for their capture, he would have liked to land both these brigades inside Suvla Bay. But as the navy could only land one brigade there, the second would have to march north *via* Lala Baba to join in the attack. This course was all the more risky as it presupposed that the Cut was dry, whereas no certain information on that point was available. In any case, as two brigades would be sent against these hills, he could not capture the Tekke Tepe ridge as well. But he considered it essential to seize as much as possible of the Kiretch Tepe ridge, and would order Hammersley, in addition to capturing the horns of the bay and the Chocolate and W Hills, to push a battalion along that ridge "as far, if possible, as Point 156",¹ and to establish touch across the plain between those troops and the troops on the W Hills.

The subsequent action of his force would be governed by accurate information, and this could only be obtained by bold reconnaissance. But his second objective would be to establish strong tactical points all along the Tekke Tepe ridge. In conclusion, he expressed a fear that the attainment of the security of Suvla Bay would absorb all his troops, and that he would be unable to give any direct assistance to General Birdwood. If, however, he met with only slight opposition Sir Ian Hamilton might rely on his giving General Birdwood all the help in his power.

The sentiments in this letter agreed so nearly with the wishes of the Commander-in-Chief that had they been translated into a precise and definite order to the two divisions concerned there would have been no ground for criticism. In effect, however, the order issued by the IX Corps on the 3rd August was not Aug. entirely in accord with this letter, and laid no stress on the vital necessity of speed.²

The IX Corps order³ stated that the primary task of the corps was to secure Suvla Bay as a base of supply, but no stress was laid on the importance of doing this quickly before the arrival of Turkish reinforcements. It explained that the corps commander did not consider that security could be attained till he was "in a position to deny to the enemy" the Tekke Tepe ridge, but it made no mention of how he intended

¹ 3½ miles from A Beach.

² Sir Ian Hamilton returned the draft copy of this order without comment on the 1st August.

³ Appendix 4.

Aug. to place himself in that position, or what exactly he meant by the term "deny".¹ The leading troops were, "if possible", to advance along the Kiretch Tepe ridge as far as Point 156, and the subsequent action of the whole force was to be governed by "a correct appreciation of the situation". This order did insist, however, that bold reconnaissances were to be made by all leading bodies of troops.

The capture of the Chocolate and W Hills was included in the 11th Division's task, but nothing was said about capturing them by a *coup de main* at night, and the possibility that the guns believed to be in position on these hills might prevent the Anzac troops from remaining on Hill 971, which they hoped to reach by dawn, was not alluded to.²

July. On the 30th July, four days before the issue of corps orders, General Hammersley held a divisional conference, and explained to the brigadiers of the 32nd and 34th Brigades the task of the division as communicated to him by General Stopford the day before, including the necessity of capturing the Chocolate and W Hills by dawn. The following morning both brigadiers were taken in a destroyer to examine the country, and on the 3rd August they made a second reconnaissance—this time with their battalion commanders.

After the issue of corps orders, however, the early capture of the W Hills was no longer insisted upon. General Hammersley's divisional order,³ issued on the 5th August, stated that his task was "to secure Suvla Bay for the disembarkation of the 10th Division and stores". He intended to seize the two horns of the bay, and Hill 10, and then to attack the Chocolate Hills and, "if possible", the W Hills. This interpolation of the words "if possible" is instructive. G.H.Q. had used the expression in their amended instructions to the corps. The corps had copied it in relation to pushing forward as far as Point 156 on the left flank. General Hammersley had caught the infection. Even the definite order by the corps for the capture of the W Hills was qualified in the divisional order by the fatal phrase "if possible". The importance of the Tekke Tepe ridge

¹ The only means of denying the ridge to the enemy was for the IX Corps to occupy it. But this, though definitely mentioned in Stopford's letter, was not stated in the corps order.

² The corps order allotted no task to the 10th Division. This would naturally depend on the progress made by Hammersley on the night of the 6th/7th. But despite Sir Ian Hamilton's wish that, if all went well at Suvla, these troops should be utilized to press S.E. towards the Afafarta gap, Stopford tentatively decided, before leaving Imbros, to use them on his extreme left when they first arrived, and he informed Hammersley of this intention.

* Appendix 5.

was not mentioned, and no instructions whatever were given for Aug. reconnaissance.

General Hammersley was still aware that he was intended to capture the Chocolate Hills before daylight; for his divisional order stated that the 34th Brigade (which was to land inside the bay) was to move forward to attack them "not later than 1.30 A.M.". Curiously enough, however, he was apparently not aware that the primary object of capturing these hills, as also the W Hills, was to assist the Anzac corps. His orders even stated that one of the objects of the Anzac attack was to distract the attention of the Turks from the landing of the 11th Division.

The detailed arrangements for brigades and battalions after landing will be followed on a later page, but at this point in the story the chain of orders must be traced for one link more to notice a further effect of the fatal phrase "if possible". In his orders for the 34th Brigade Br.-General W. H. Sitwell detailed one battalion to proceed "if possible" to Point 156, and two battalions to assault the two Chocolate Hills "under regimental arrangements". But he made no provision for an attack on the W Hills, and no mention was made of the necessity of subsequent reconnaissance.

Thus it will be seen that by the eve of the Suvla landing the original intention of the Commander-in-Chief—that the Chocolate and W Hills should be captured before dawn, and that, by the same hour, a line of posts should be established on the Tekke Tepe ridge—had been so whittled down that the only definite order which had reached the troops was for the capture—by no definite hour—of the two Chocolate Hills.

It has already been mentioned that the troops for the Suvla landing were first to assemble at Imbros. The 32nd and 34th Brigades of the 11th Division arrived there by the 24th July, and the 33rd Brigade, after ten days' experience of active service conditions at Helles,¹ followed on the 2nd August. The 4th (Highland) Mountain Brigade, which was to land with the 11th Division, was also sent over from Helles at this time; and its old 10-pdr. guns, which were now quite worn out, were replaced by eight others, "found on a storeship", which were said to be "worn but serviceable". The LIX Brigade R.F.A.,

¹ The 33rd Brigade had temporarily relieved the R.N.D. in the line. It had suffered a loss of 84 officers and men at Helles, but its fighting efficiency as a result of these ten days' experience had increased by 50 per cent.

which was also to land at Suvla, arrived at Imbros from Egypt on the morning of the 5th, but did not disembark.

After reaching Imbros the units of the 11th Division were practised in embarking and disembarking from the new motor lighters, and some of these exercises, carried out at night, were followed by an advance inland. But throughout this period no hint was allowed to be given—other than to brigade and battalion commanders—of the rôle the various brigades would have to play, and none of the units had any idea of their destination till just before they sailed.

The stifling days at Imbros while waiting for the operations to begin were a trying time for all the rank and file. In the face of official silence the dusty camps were alive with vague rumours as to the desperate nature of the enterprise in which the troops would soon find themselves engaged. The great heat was a severe trial to men straight from England; the prevailing epidemic took firm hold of the division; the sick-list mounted steadily; and officers and men alike were weak with diarrhoea.

The current idea amongst the troops at this time was that they were to land on the Asiatic coast. With a view to deceiving the Turks, Sir Ian Hamilton had ordered maps of the Asia Minor coast-line to be printed off in Egypt; and, in order to keep the real destination secret, these maps were issued to all the new divisions.

At Mudros, throughout the acutely anxious week which preceded the opening of the offensive, the staffs of the Principal Naval Transport Officer and the Inspector-General of Communications were struggling manfully with their own difficult problems connected with the concentration. More light draught troop-carriers and more small craft for harbour use had fortunately arrived in the very nick of time; yet the difficulties of the transport department were still immense. The number of troop movements to be carried out punctually and secretly, and the vast amount of urgent stores and supplies to be landed on the peninsula, were straining their resources to breaking-point. Their work had to be completed without docks or cranes or wharves or piers or any of the normal facilities of a port. There was still an alarming shortage of tugs and lighters and launches and other small craft, and a great deficiency of skilled labour. Nor had the naval and military staffs at Mudros any previous knowledge of the technical business of traffic management. Their one asset, and an asset which pulled them through, was a spirit of tireless enthusiasm. By hook or crook the work had got to be done, and by super-human efforts they did it. The happy manner in which the two

services pulled together throughout these anxious days, and the Aug. absence of any form of friction, were largely responsible for their success.

By the morning of the 3rd August the preliminary sea-movements in connection with the huge reinforcements of the Anzac corps—the landing of 7,000 drafts, 40 guns, and vast quantities of stores and supplies—had been completed; and now began the most delicate task of all, the landing and hiding away of the 13th Division, the 29th Brigade of the 10th Division, and the Indian infantry brigade. Thanks to the faultless arrangements of the Anzac corps this operation, too, with one small exception, was safely carried out. Each night the troop-carriers unloaded their freights under cover of darkness; the troops were safely tucked away in their prepared hiding-places; and by morning the anchorages and the wide expanse of the Aegean within sight of the Turkish observation posts were again bare of ships. Throughout these operations the enemy remained unaware of the British activities, and it is probably true that no more pregnant enterprise than the landing of this large force under the very nose of the enemy, and keeping it concealed for three days, is recorded in the annals of war.

The secret concentration at Anzac, however, was not completed without moments of acute anxiety. On the 1st August the non-arrival of a water-lighter and tug, which had left Alexandria for Anzac on the 23rd July, threatened to upset the nicely calculated arrangements for watering the enlarged garrison. Sir William Birdwood telegraphed that morning:

Unless water-boats turn up immediately shall have to abandon major part of programme for landing. . . . All available men required for water fatigues. Our wells have dried up and pump is not working. 9,000 men already on fatigues, irrespective of sappers.

This news was sufficiently serious, but another water-boat was found to replace the missing vessel and the situation was saved.

Another source of anxiety was the daily increasing activity of the Turkish artillery against the Anzac beach and piers; but fortunately this firing was confined to the daylight hours.

Anxiety reached its peak on the morning of the 6th August. By some mischance the troop-carriers had been late in arriving overnight, and though the 29th Brigade was safely put ashore under cover of darkness, the Indians were still landing at day-break. The Turks opened fire on the troop-carrier, and the shelling became so heavy that the disembarkation had to be suspended and 200 men were taken back to Imbros. About an hour later the Turks began a vigorous attack on Leane's Post,

Aug. on the Anzac right flank. They were eventually driven off, but the fighting did not die down till nearly 10 A.M. and it cost the 11th Australian Battalion 150 casualties. The rest of the morning at Anzac passed quietly. It gradually became clear that the incident had had no connection with the discovery of the Indian troops landing, and the preparations for the main attacks that evening received no further check.

By the morning of the 6th August, therefore, the preliminary concentration for the great offensive at last stood complete. The second act of the Gallipoli drama was at long last to begin. The stage was set: at Helles and Anzac the actors were already in their places. All that now remained was for the 11th Division to be ferried over to Suvla, and for the two brigades of the 10th to be brought up from Mudros and Mitviene to reinforce at daybreak. But even this final move was not without its anxieties. Imbros was 15 miles, Mudros 60 and Mitylene 120 miles from the theatre of operations. And German submarines were lurking in the narrow waters of the Ægean.